

# THE ROBBERY IN THE SLEEPING CAR.

By ROBERT BARR.

## VIII.—The Robbery in the Sleeping Car.

(Copyright, 1899, by the Author.)

Jennie had promised Professor Selgriff not to communicate with the director of police, and she now wondered whether she would be breaking her word or not if she let that official know the result of her investigation when it could make no difference, one way or the other, to the professor. If Professor Selgriff could have foreseen his own sudden death, would he not, she asked herself, have preferred to make public all she knew of him, for had he not constantly reiterated that a messenger, and the consequent transmission of his name to posterity, was what he worked for? Then there was this consideration—the chief of police was not told how the explosion had been caused, his fruitless search would go fruitfully on, and doubtless, in the course of police inquiry, many innocent persons would be arrested, put to inconvenience and expense, but that was even a chance that one or more who had absolutely nothing to do with the affair might be imprisoned for life. She resolved, therefore, to tell the director of the police all she knew, which she would not have done had Professor Selgriff been alive. She accordingly sent a messenger, and the chief official, and just as she had begun to relate to the impatient press what had happened he was announced. The three of them held convention in Jennie's drawing room with locked doors.

"I am in a position," began Jennie, "to tell you how the explosion in the treasury was caused, and I am anxious to do so, but you must promise to grant me two favors, each of which is in your power to bestow without inconvenience."

"What are they?" asked the director of police cautiously.

"To tell what they are is to tell part of my story. You must first promise blindly and afterward keep your promise faithfully."

"Those are rather unusual terms, Miss Baxter," said the chief, "but I accede to them, the more willingly as we have found that all the gold is still in the treasury, as you said it was."

"Very well, then, the first favor is that I shall not be called to give testimony when an inquest is held on the body of Prof. Carl Selgriff."

"You amaze me!" cried the director. "How do you know he was dead? I had news of it only a moment before I left my office."

"I was with him when he died," said Jennie simply, which statement drew forth an exclamation of surprise from both the prince and the director. "My next request is that you destroy utterly a machine which stands on a table near the center of the professor's room. Perhaps the instrument is already disabled—I believe it is—but nevertheless, I shall state the facts, and you have seen that every vestige of it is made away with, because the study of what is left of it may enable some other scientist to put it in working order again. I entreat you to attend to this matter yourself."

"I will go with you, if you wish me to, and point out the instrument, in case it has been moved from its position."

"The room is sealed up," said the director, "and nothing will be touched until I arrive there. What is the nature of this instrument?"

"It is of a nature so deadly and destructive that if it got into the hands of an anarchist he could alone lay the city of Vienna in ruins."

"Good heavens!" cried the horrified official, whose bane was the anarchists, and Jennie, in mentioning this particular type of criminals, had better than she knew. If she had told him that the professor's invention might enable Austria to conquer all the surrounding nations, there is every chance that the machine would have been carefully preserved.

"The explosion in the treasury vaults," continued Jennie, "was accidentally caused by that instrument, and the machine also at the moment was in a garret half a mile away. You saw the terrible effect of that explosion. Imagine, then, the destruction it would cause in the hands of one of those anarchists."

"I shall destroy the instrument with my own hands," asserted the director fervently, mopping his pallid brow.

Jennie then went on, to the increasing astonishment of the prince and the director, and related every detail of her interview with the late Professor Carl Selgriff.

"I shall go on now to annihilate that machine," said the director, when the recital had been finished. "I shall see to it that myself. Then, after the inquest, I shall give an order that everything in the attic is to be destroyed. I wish all the scientists on the face of the earth could be safely placed behind prison bars."

"I am afraid," said Jennie, "to do much good," said Jennie, "unless you could prevent chemicals being smuggled in. The scientists would probably reduce your prison to powder and walk calmly out through the door."

Mr. Hardwick had told Jennie that if she solved the Vienna mystery she would make a European reputation for the Daily Bugle. Jennie did more than was expected of her, yet the European reputation which the Bugle established was not one to be ended. It is true that the account printed of the cause of the explosion, and the tragically finished off with the professor's tragical death, caused a great sensation in London. The comic papers of the week were full of illustrations showing the uses to which the professor's instrument might be put. It was said that any sane man in England believed that the professor had been printed to cast an undesired light upon the intelligence of the British public. No one doubted that if a newspaper had published an account of what could be done by Roentgen rays without being able to demonstrate practically the truth of the assertions made the article would have been laughed at. If some years ago a newspaper had stated that a man in York listened to the voice of a friend at that moment standing in London, and was not only able to hear what his friend said, but could actually recognize the voice speaking in an ordinary tone, and that if the man had added that unfortunately the instrument which accomplished this had been destroyed, people would have spoken of the sensational nature of modern journalism.

Letters poured in upon the editor saying that while, as a general thing, the writers were willing to stand the ordinary lies of commerce daily printed in the sheet there was a limit to their credulity, and that they objected to be taken for driving imbeciles.

To complete the discomfiture of the Daily Bugle the government of Austria published a semi-official story, which, after being printed over the earth. The statement was written in that calm, serious and consistent tone which diplomats use when uttering a falsehood of more than ordinary dimensions.

Irresponsible rumors had been floating about (the official proclamation begun) to the effect that there had been an explosion in the treasury at Vienna. It had been stated that a large quantity of gold had been stolen and that a disaster of some kind had occurred in the treasury vaults. Then a ridiculous story had been printed, which asserted that Professor Selgriff, one of Austria's honored dead, had in some manner that savored of the black art accompanied this wholesale destruction. The government then begged to make the fol-

lowing declarations: First, not a penny had been stolen out of the treasury; second, the corpse was intact; third, the gold, in its forms, reposited and securely within its bolted doors; fourth, the coins were not, as had been alleged, those belonging to various countries, which was a covert intimation that Austria had hostile intent against one or the other of those friendly nations (the whole country of this so-called war chest, which was a war chest at all, but merely the receptacle of a reserve fund which Austria possessed, was entirely in Austrian coinage); fifth, in order that these sensational and disquieting scandals should be set at rest, the government announced that it intended to weigh this gold upon a certain date, and invited representatives of the press from Russia, Germany, France and England to witness this weighing.

"The day after this tray weight function had taken place in Vienna long telegraphic accounts of it appeared in the English press, and several solemn leading articles were put forward in the editorial columns, which, without mentioning the name of the Daily Bugle, deplored the voracity of the sensational editor, who respected neither the amity which should exist between friendly nations nor the good name of the honored and respected dead in his foolish hunt for sensation. Nothing was too high a price for the Daily Bugle to pay for the supposed gullibility of a fickle public. But, fortunately, in the long run, these steady sheets asserted, such actions recoiled upon the head of him who promulgated them. Sensational journalism merited and received the scathing contempt of all honorable men, and on one of the reviews had an article entitled, 'Some Aspects of Modern Journalism,' which struck the head of the Daily Bugle with a sledge hammer, and in one of the quarters of a professor at Cambridge showed the absurdity of the alleged invention from a scientific point of view."

"I swear," cried Mr. Hardwick, as he paced up and down his room, "that I shall be more careful after this in the handling of the truth. It is a dangerous thing to meddle with. If you tell the truth about a man you are muled in a libel suit, and if you tell the truth about a nation the united press of the country is down upon you. Ah, well, I make no secret of the fact that I am interested, and we are baffled to fight better, as Browning says."

The editor had sent for Miss Baxter, and she now sat by his desk while he paced up and down the floor. The doors were closed and locked so that they might not be interrupted. This messenger was the editor's manner that something important was on hand. Jennie had returned to London after a month's stay in Vienna and had been occupied for a week at her old routine work in the office.

"Now, Miss Baxter," said the editor, when he had produced his high chair, "I shall workable material in journalism. I have plan to set before you, and when you know what it is I am quite prepared to hear you refuse to have anything to do with it, and remember, if you do undertake it, there is but one chance in a million of your succeeding. It is of a nature so deadly and destructive that if it got into the hands of an anarchist he could alone lay the city of Vienna in ruins."

"To St. Petersburg!" echoed the girl in dismay.

"Yes," said the editor, mistaking the purport of her ejaculation. "It is a very long journey, but you can travel in great comfort. I will now go on to explain to you, in obtaining for yourself any luxury the travel can afford during this car, for one berth has been taken by the British embassy-room C, near the center, marked with a cross."

"Ah, well, I will take this compartment next to it—Room D, isn't it?" said Jennie.

"Oh, I am sorry to say that it has been taken. Those two compartments which are bespoken. I will see under what name it has been booked. Probably its occupant is English, also. But I can give you Room B, on the other side of the one reserved by the embassy. It is a two-berth room, Nos. 5 and 6."

"That is all right, as well," said Jennie. The clerk looked up the order book and then said:

"It is not recorded here by whom Room D was booked. As a usual thing," he continued, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, and looking furtively over his shoulder, "no name is recorded on the journey book, but if you discovered him to be your fellow-passenger it might perhaps make the business that comes after easier. You see this envelope," said the editor, taking from a drawer in his desk a large envelope, the flap of which was secured by a great piece of stamped sealing wax, and which contained a humble ordinary copy of the issue of the Daily Bugle, but in outside appearance it might be taken for a duplicate of the letter which is to leave St. Petersburg on the 21st. Now, what I would like you to do is to take this envelope in your handbag and if on the journey back to London you have an opportunity of securing the real letter and leaving this in its place you will have accomplished the greatest service you have yet done for the paper."

"That," cried Jennie, rising, "I couldn't do that. Mr. Hardwick, I couldn't think of doing it. It is nothing short of highway robbery!"

"I know it looks like that," pleaded Mr. Hardwick, "but listen to me. If I were going to open the letter and use its contents, then you might charge me with instigating theft. The fact is, the letter will not be delayed; it will reach the hands of the high and mighty personage in England quite intact. The only difference is that you will be its bearer instead of the messenger they send for it."

"You expect to open the letter, then, in some surreptitious way—some way that will not be noticed afterward? Oh, I couldn't do it, Mr. Hardwick."

"My dear girl, you are jumping at conclusions. I shall amaze you when I tell you that I know already practically what the contents of the letter are."

"Then what is the use of going to all this expense and trouble trying to steal it?"

"Don't say 'steal it,' Miss Baxter. I'll tell you what my motive is. There is an official in England who has gone out of his way to throw obstacles in mine. This is needless and irritating, for generally I manage to get the news I am in quest of; but in several instances, owing to his opposition, I have not only not got the news, but other papers have. Now, since the general raking we have had over this Austrian business, quite aside from the fact that we published the exact truth, this stupid old official duffer has taken it upon himself to exceedingly sneeringly rebuke me, and I confess I want to take him down a peg. He hasn't any idea that I know as much about this business as I do—in fact, he thinks it is an absolute secret—yet, if I liked, I could tomorrow nullify all the ar-

rangements by simply publishing what is already in my possession, which action on my part would cause a furore in Russia, and, no less a furore in Austria. For the sake of amity between nations, which I am accused of disregarding, I hold my hand."

"Now, if you get possession of that envelope I want you to telegraph to me while you are en route to London, and I will meet you at the terminus. Then I shall take the document direct to this office, even before the regular messenger has time to reach him. I shall say to the official: 'There is the document from the high personage in Russia to the high personage in England. If you want the document, I will give it to you, but it must be understood that you are to be a little less friendly to certain newspapers and a little more friendly to mine in future.'"

"And suppose he refuses your terms?"

"He won't refuse them; but if he does I shall hand him the envelope just the same."

"Well, honestly, Mr. Hardwick, I don't think you are worth the amount of money it will cost, and, besides, the chance of my getting hold of the document, which will doubtless be locked safely within a dispatch box and constantly under the eye of the messenger, is most remote."

"I am more than willing to risk all that if you will undertake the journey. You speak lightly of my scheme, but that is merely because you do not understand the situation. Everything you have heretofore done has been of temporary advantage to the paper, but if you carry this off I expect the editor of the Bugle will be leaving it will give me a standing with certain officials that I have never before succeeded in getting. In the first place, it will make them afraid of me, and that of itself is a powerful lever when we are trying to get information which they are anxious to give to some other paper."

"Very well, Mr. Hardwick; I will try, but I warn you to expect nothing but failure. In everything else I have endeavored to do I have felt confident of success from the beginning. In this instance I am as sure I shall fail."

"As I told you, Miss Baxter, the project is so difficult that your failure, if you do fail, will merely make a bogus document to me, because I am sure that if any one on earth could carry it out you are that person; and, furthermore, I am very much obliged to you for consenting to attempt such a mission."

And thus it was that Jennie Baxter found herself in Room B, the two-berth compartment, the north, with a room in the Hotel de l'Europe overlooking the Nevski Prospect. In ordinary circumstances she would have enjoyed a visit to St. Petersburg, but she was afraid to venture out, being under the apprehension that at any moment she might meet Lord Selgriff, and that would be a disaster. Therefore she remained discreetly in her room, watching the strange street scenes from her window. She found herself scrutinizing every one who had the appearance of being an Englishman, and she had to confess to a little qualm of disapproval when she saw the person in the next room, who was Lord Selgriff, in fact, during her short stay at St. Petersburg she saw nothing of the young man.

Jennie went, on the evening of her arrival, to the offices of the sleeping-car company, so as to secure a place in one of the carriages that left at 6 o'clock on the evening of the 21st. Her initial difficulty met her when she learned there were several sleeping cars on that train, and she was puzzled to know which to select. She stood there, hesitating, with the plans of the carriages on the table before her.

"You have ample choice," said the clerk. "I usually see the trains, so long in advance, and only two places have been taken in the train so far."

"I should like to be in a carriage containing some English people," said the girl, not knowing what excuse to give for her hesitation.

"Then let me recommend this car, for one berth has been taken by the British embassy-room C, near the center, marked with a cross."

"Ah, well, I will take this compartment next to it—Room D, isn't it?" said Jennie.

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"Did you bore holes between that and the adjoining compartment?"

"Yes, your Excellency, but Asaf did not tell me whether you wanted the holes at the top or the bottom."

"At the bottom, of course," replied the Russian. "Any fool might have known that. The gas must rise, not fall; then when he found a hole, and Asaf told him he will be in a denser layer of it, whereas if we put it in at the top and he fell down he would come into pure air and so might make his escape. You did not bore the hole over the top berth, I hope?"

"Yes, your Excellency, but I bored one at the bottom also."

"The window is securely fastened, your Excellency, unless he breaks the glass."

"Oh, he will not think of doing that until he has broken the door and window, adding people. How many other passengers are there in the car?"

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PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR.

The Negro Author's Success in Conquer Hall Songs—In New York.

Washington Letter in Boston Transcript.

Paul Laurence Dunbar, the negro poet and writer, and author of the best and most popular "coon songs" ever written, is living ill at No. 131 West 127th street, New York City.

The stupendous sale of his songs written in connection with Will Marion, and the fact that he has been elected to the position of librarian of the Library of Congress and to go to New York, where, at the Broadway Theatre, he is to read a new play of his production. It is thought that his close attendance at rehearsals, connected with the production of the play, have unhealthily weakened his constitution. Every day some of the tramps crowd about the library doors when he is writing.

Dunbar was a favorite with the editors who came in connection with him to the Library of Congress, and his literary ability as well as his congenial personality enlisted the interest of John Russell Young, the deceased librarian, and through him, as well as the interest of the publishers, Messrs. H. S. Howells and other noted literary men of the day, the library position was gained. However, Dunbar's health is so poor that he is unable to take on the duties of the position, and he is now in New York, where, at the Broadway Theatre, he is to read a new play of his production. It is thought that his close attendance at rehearsals, connected with the production of the play, have unhealthily weakened his constitution. Every day some of the tramps crowd about the library doors when he is writing.

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